There is another cause of alteration more prevalent than any other, which yet in the present state of the world cannot be obviated. A mixture of two languages will produce a third distinct from both, and they will always be mixed, where the chief part of education, and the most conspicuous accomplishment, is skill in ancient or in foreign tongues. He that has long cultivated another language, will find its words and combinations croud upon his memory; and haste and negligence, refinement and affectation, will obtrude borrowed terms and exotick expressions.

The great pest of speech is frequency of translation. No book was ever turned from one language into another, without imparting something of its native idiom; this is the most mischievous and comprehensive innovation; single words may enter by thousands, and the fabrick of the tongue continue the same, but new phraseology changes much at once; it alters not the single stones of the building, but the order of the columns. If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our stile, which I, who can never wish to see dependance multiplied, hope the spirit of *English* liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavour, with all their influence, to stop the licence of translatours, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of *France*.

If the changes that we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? it remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure. Life may be lengthened by care, though death cannot be ultimately defeated: tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration; we have long preserved our constitution, let us make some struggles for our language.

In hope of giving longevity to that which its own nature forbids to be immortal, I have devoted this book, the labour of years, to the honour of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology to the nations of the continent. The chief glory of every people arises from its authours: whether I shall add any thing by my own writings to the reputation of *English* literature, must be left to time: much of my life has been lost under the pressures of disease; much has been trifled away; and much has always been spent in provision for the day that was passing over me; but I shall not think my employment useless or ignoble, if by my assistance foreign nations, and distant ages, gain access to the propagators of knowledge, and understand the teachers of truth; if my labours afford light to the repositories of science, and add celebrity to *Bacon*, to *Hooker*, to *Milton*, and to *Boyle*.

When I am animated by this wish, I look with pleasure on my book, however defective, and deliver it to the world with the spirit of a man that has endeavoured well. That it will immediately become popular I have not promised to myself: a few wild blunders, and risible absurdities, from which no work of such multiplicity was ever free, may for a time furnish folly with laughter, and harden ignorance in contempt; but useful diligence will at last prevail, and there never can be wanting some who distinguish desert; who will consider that no dictionary of a living tongue ever can be perfect, since while it is hastening to publication, some words are budding, and some falling away; that a whole life cannot be spent upon syntax and etymology, and that even a whole life would not be sufficient; that he, whose design includes whatever language can express, must often speak of what he does not understand; that a writer will sometimes be hurried by eagerness to the end, and sometimes faint with weariness under a task, which *Scaliger* compares to the labours of the anvil and the mine; that what is obvious is not always known, and what is known is not always present; that sudden fits of inadvertency will surprize vigilance, slight avocations will seduce attention, and casual eclipses of the mind will darken learning; and that the writer shall often in vain trace his memory at the moment of need, for that which yesterday he knew with intuitive readiness, and which will come uncalled into his thoughts to-morrow.

In this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed; and though no book was ever spared out of tenderness to the authour, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it, that the *English Dictionary* was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow: and it may repress the triumph of malignant criticism to observe, that if our language is not here fully displayed, I have only failed in an attempt which no human powers have hitherto completed. If the lexicons of ancient tongues, now immutably fixed, and comprised in a few volumes, be yet, after the toil of successive ages, inadequate and delusive; if the aggregated knowledge, and co-operating diligence of the *Italian* academicians, did not secure them from the censure of *Beni*; if the embodied criticks of *France*, when fifty years had been spent upon their work, were obliged to change its oeconomy, and give their second edition another form, I may surely be contented without the praise of perfection, which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.

THE

HISTORY

OF THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

THOUGH the *Britains* or *Welsh* were the first possessors of this island, whose names are recorded, and are therefore in civil history always considered as the predecessors of the present inhabitants; yet the deduction of the *English* language, from the earliest times of which we have any knowledge to its present state, requires no mention of them: for we have so few words, which can, with any probability, be refered to *British* roots, that we justly regard the *Saxons* and *Welsh*, as nations totally distinct. It has been conjectured, that when the *Saxons* seized this country, they suffered the *Britains* to live among them in a state of vassalage, employed in the culture of the ground, and other laborious and ignoble services. But it is scarcely possible, that a nation, however depressed, should have been mixed in considerable numbers with the *Saxons* without some communication of their tongue, and therefore it may, with great reason, be imagined, that those, who were not sheltered in the mountains, perished by the sword.

The whole fabrick and scheme of the *English* language is *Gothick* or *Teutonick*: it is a dialect of that tongue, which prevails over all the northern countries of *Europe*, except those where the *Sclavonian* is spoken. Of these languages Dr. *Hickes* has thus exhibited the genealogy.

GOTHICK,

ANGLO-SAXON,	FRANCICK,	CIMBRICK,
Dutch, Frisick, English.	German.	Islandick, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish.

Of the *Gothick*, the only monument remaining is a copy of the gospels somewhat mutilated, which, from the silver with which the characters are adorned, is called the *silver book*. It is now preserved at *Upsal*, and has been twice published. Whether the diction of this venerable manuscript be purely *Gothick*, has been doubted; it seems however to exhibit the most ancient dialect now to be found of the *Teutonick* race, and the *Saxon*, which is the original of the present *English*, was either derived from it, or both descended from some common parent.

What was the form of the *Saxon* language, when, about the year 450, they first entred *Britain*, cannot now be known. They seem to have been a people without learning, and very probably without an alphabet; their speech therefore, having been always cursory and extemporaneous, must have been artless and unconnected, without any modes of transition or involution of clauses; which abruptness and inconnection may be observed even in their later writings. This barbarity may be supposed to have continued during their wars with the *Britains*, which for a time left them no leisure for softer studies; nor is there any reason for supposing it abated, till the year 570, when *Augustine* came from *Rome* to convert them to Christianity. The Christian religion always implies or produces a certain degree of civility and learning; they then became by degrees acquainted with the *Roman* language, and so gained, from time to time, some knowledge and elegance, till in three centuries they had formed a language capable of expressing all the sentiments of a civilised people, as appears by king *Alfred*'s paraphrase or imitation of *Boethius*, and his short preface, which I have selected as the first specimen of ancient *English*.

CAP. I.

ON ðære tide þe Gotan of Sciððiu mægþe wiþ Romana rice gewin upahofon. ⁊ miþ heora cyningum. Rædgota and Eallerica wæron hatne. Romane burig abræcon. and eall Italia rice þ is betwux þam muntum ⁊ Sicilia ðam ealonde in anwald gerehton. ⁊ þa ægter þam foresprecenan cyningum Þeodric feng to þam ilcan rice se Þeodric wæs Amulinga. he wæs Cristen. þeah he on þam Arrianiscan gedwolan ðurhwunode. He gehet Romanum his freondscipe. swa þ hi mostan heora ealdrihta wyrðe beon. Ac he þa gehat swiðe yfele gelæste. ⁊ swiðe wraþe geendode mid manegum mane. þ wæs to eacan oþrum unarimedum yflum. þ he Iohannes þone papan het ofslean. Ða wæs sum consul. þ we heretoha hataþ. Boetius wæs haten. se wæs in boccræftum ⁊ on woruld þeawum se rihtwisesta. Se ða ongeat þa manigfealdan yfel þe se cyning Þeodric wiþ þam Cristenandome ⁊ wiþ þam Romaniscum witum dyde. he þa gemunde ðara eþnessa ⁊ þara ealdrihta ðe hi under ðam Caserum hæfdon heora ealdhlafordum. Ða ongan he smeagan ⁊ leornigan on him selfum hu he þ rice ðam unrihtwisan cyninge aferran mihte. ⁊ on ryht geleaffulra and on rihtwisra anwald gebringan. Sende þa digellice ærendgewritu to þam Casere to Constantinopolim. þær is Creca heah burg ⁊ heora cynestol. for þam se Casere wæs heora ealdhlaford cynnes. bædon hine þæt he him to heora Cristendome ⁊ to heora ealdrihtum gefultumede. Ða þ ongeat se wælhreowa cyning Þeodric. ða het he hine gebringan on carcerne ⁊ þær inne belucan. Ða hit ða gelomp þ se arwyrða wæs on swa micelre nearanesse becom. þa wæs he swa micle swiðor on his Mode gedrefed. swa his Mod ær swiðor to þam woruld sælþum ungewod wæs. ⁊ he ða nanre frofre be innan þam carcerne ne gemunde. ac he gefeoll niwol of dune on þa flor. ⁊ hine astrehte swiþe unrot. and ormod hine selfne ongan wepan ⁊ þus singende cwæþ.